



3 May 2006



MAY 5TH CELEBRATIONS

1. This year Buddha's Birthday and Children's Day fall on the same day – May 5th. In Korea, these are celebrated as national holidays and many local communities schedule special events and activities to commemorate these unique holidays. To enhance your understanding of these particular days, I encourage you to participate in as many activities as you can. I know you will find them not only interesting and rewarding, but also give you insight into some wonderful Korea customs.
2. For those who are unfamiliar with Buddhist traditions, the week before the actual birthday of the founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha), is a week of festivities, parades and the lighting of lotus lanterns all over the peninsula. The lighting of a lantern according to Buddhist scripture symbolizes the road to enlightenment, so it is common to see a variety of lotus lanterns lining the streets at night. The process of making these lanterns is as important as lighting them, so many activities in celebration of Buddha's Birthday include lantern making as a key event.
3. May 5th also marks "Children's Day", a day dedicated to children and their need for dignity, love and respect. On Children's Day, many cities host parades and most museums, zoos, theaters and amusement parks offer free admission for children. It is common for adults to give children gifts and prepare special meals in honor of children. You will find traditional games being played, as well as special Tae Kwon Do demonstrations taking place. I think this is a wonderful custom and one that our own families can easily participate in by making the time to do something special with your children such as taking a walk, reading a favorite story or just expressing to them how important they are to you. We ask so much of our military family members and particularly our kids. They deserve a special day where we thank them for their support.
4. The Republic of Korea is a wonderful country and you can increase your appreciation of the culture and understanding of its people by simply choosing to learn more about it. Demonstrate your willingness to be involved by actively participating in your community level activities and events. Your tour will be enriched by your experience.

We Go Together!

B. B. BELL
General, US Army
Commander

FREEDOM'S FRONTIER!

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